Faith and Inspiration

An Audience of Many

Have you ever heard someone pray and thought, "They're talking to the room, not to God"? The prayer sounds like a Sunday-morning announcement in the guise of worship, using pointed language to state how the petitioner desires people act and behave: "Gracious heavenly father, thank you for the joy that is our annual potluck meal, and may all who come at 4:30 on Wednesday night—whether they bring a covered dish or not, Lord, you know all are welcome, we're glad they're there—may all who come park in the back first as a courtesy to late-comers, and may all be blessed."

Luke Marshburn
Homestead Mennonite Church

These kinds of prayers often feel less than sincere. They may be a conversation, but it's less with God and more with the Humans in earshot. If the focus is not on conversing with God, then are such prayers really honoring him, or are they just empty words? For a time, I was convinced that any prayer meant for the not-Gods in the room, the Human audience listening to the conversation, had no place in our lives.

But then I noticed that Jesus does one such prayer. During the mourning of Lazarus' death, just after asking for the stone to be rolled away from Lazarus' tomb, "Jesus looked up and said, 'Father, I thank you that you have heard me. I knew that you always hear me, but I said this for the benefit of the people standing here, that they may believe that you sent me' " (John 11:41-42).

Jesus, in no uncertain terms, notes that his spoken prayer is not just a conversation. It is a message for those listening, and for those generations to come who would read about the raising of Lazarus. Its purpose is to be proof of God's power, helping us believe that Jesus truly is the son of God. Perhaps the reality of prayer is more complicated than two-way communication.

Sometimes, the main point of a spoken prayer might not be to have God hear it—something that we can do at all times, silent, aloud, or through the wordless groaning of our minds and hearts. God doesn't need soundwaves or words to understand our desires, fears, questions, and praises.

Other people do need those sound waves more often than not. A spoken prayer, while still talking with God, may in fact have other motives, reasons for why speech is the chosen medium. Those reasons will have to do with the other members of the audience. Someone in need of comfort might crave our own sobbing voice showing empathy. Or someone yearns for reassurance and needs to know our own firm conviction. Maybe they have to realize they're not alone, and hearing someone's intercession on their behalf is the proof that other Humans stand with them in their struggles. These seem like worthy goals, prayers that pull the weight a silent prayer can't match.

My own voice struggles with such prayers. I tend to focus on the relationship with God and his omnipotence, touching on how he already knows all that we desire better than we could ever say it, asking him to help us trust in him and feel the joy and comfort of the relationship rather than that he aid us in specific ways. I don't believe that's a bad thing; prayers are conversations, after all, and my goal when talking with God is often to be receptive to his promptings, keeping myself cognizant of the need for trust in the relationship and not demanding he move in a way that I deem appropriate.

But such prayers said out loud may feel of little comfort to the orphans and widows, the people fighting cancer or homelessness or bankruptcy. Sometimes people need to hear, "Lord, heal us"; or "God, she needs a job"; or "If you could just get me out of this situation, Jesus, that's what I really want right now." Just as there's a time and place to say, "Lord, I know you hear me and thank you for it," prayers begging God to bend fate a certain way, whether petitioning on the behalf of the speaker or of others, have value.

Let's remember that spoken prayers do not have an audience of one. Honoring God with our words doesn't mean ignoring the impact our speech may have on those around us. A few pointed words could be just what God wants us to say, not for himself, but as a benefit for the people standing with us.

Florida Nears 57,000 COVID-19 Deaths

NSF - Florida is nearing 57,000 resident deaths from COVID-19 since the pandemic started in early 2020, according to a report released by the state Department of Health. At the beginning of the week, the state totaled 56,667 deaths, up from 55,299 in a report issued the week prior.

The report also showed that Florida has topped 3.6 million COVID-19 cases since the pandemic started.

The Dept. of Health said 72 percent of Floridians ages 12 or older had received at least one dose of COVID-19 with 92 percent of the people in Miami-Dade vaccinated. The Florida data showed that 3,945 inpatients at 259 hospitals had COVID-19, down from 4,588 patients a week earlier. Also, it showed that 1,081 patients were in intensive-care unit beds, down from 1,223 a week earlier.

OBITUARY

Randall Ray Moore

Randall Ray Moore, was born on September 15, 1964 in Smolan, Kansas. He died on September 30, 2021 in Chattanooga TN.

Randy died suddenly due to COVID 19.

Before moving to Homestead, Randy was a long time resident of Richmond KY. He retired from UPS in 2019.

He loved to hike, fish and listen to classical music.

Randy is survived by his daughter, Savannah Moore, of Bradenton, Florida and sisters, Robin Marcus, Margie Cooper and Elizabeth Sanchez, all of Homestead FL and Rhonda Monroe of Lansing, Michigan.

Randy was preceded in death by his mother, Donna Claudette Moore and father, Wayne Moore.

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